

Creating with Concrete

By Carol Lamkins, CID, CMKBD



Courtesy of Sean Dunston, SGP

The design can have a light floating appearance or be massive. Objects and/or surfaces can be wall mounted, positioned on a cabinet or top a freeform pedestal. Curves, slopes and changes in elevation are all possible using this design-friendly material. Concrete is a great medium for wall art. Designs are limited only by the imagination.

Concrete design has evolved into many different design applications. What distinguishes concrete is its appearance and that it is easily and completely customizable. Custom designs can be free flowing or geometric. The material can be sculpted, molded and texturized. It can be grinded, polished, stamped, or stained. Meaningful objects can be embedded before the concrete sets.



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



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Concrete is frequently used for kitchen and bathroom countertops, sinks and lavatories, fireplace facades, hearths and mantles, patios, garden paths and water features. It is also used for flooring in both commercial and residential applications.



Courtesy of Bare Vines Concrete Designs



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Concrete is very similar to granite in terms of physical properties. It is a hard, durable countertop surface and weighs about the same as granite. It is installed like granite using a substrate material such as plywood. Concrete weighs about the same as granite on a per square foot basis. Well-constructed cabinets should be suitable for supporting concrete countertops.

Properly made concrete countertops will not develop structural cracks. Although, it is possible that hairline cracks could appear. These are purely cosmetic and do not affect the structural integrity of the countertop. Some consider it part of the natural handmade character of concrete countertops.



Courtesy of Bare Vines Concrete Designs

Concrete countertops are porous and have to be sealed and maintained. The sealant will protect the countertops from stains. Food, acids and oils will usually not stain concrete countertops if wiped up immediately. The countertops can be cleaned with mild soapy water when needed and may need to be resealed at some point in the future depending upon the sealant manufacturer's recommendation on the label plus the frequency and type of use. Some sealants last as long as 5 to 10 years. Others need to be applied every six months to one year. Waxing is another option that protects the surface. However, waxing is very sensitive to heat and should be done frequently.

It is recommended that hot pots are not placed on top of the cement countertop. The heat causes expansion and contraction of both the sealant/wax and the concrete and may weaken or crack the bonding. Exposed areas may flake or chip away. The thermal shock of the countertop may also warp the pot. Trivets should always be used to support hot cookware.

It is also recommended that the countertop not be used for cutting and slicing as sharp objects can scratch and gouge into the finish. Not only might it damage the countertop but also will dull the blade of the knife.

The cost is based on the complexity of the form, the mold-making process and the desired finish, rather than the actual volume. Therefore, material cost comparisons should be done on a project-by-project basis.

Concrete is an extraordinary material that is practical, expressive and aesthetic all at once. The possibilities for creative expression are endless. Below are several examples showing design creativity, visual textures and scope of application.

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TEXTURES



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



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EDGES



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VERTICAL APPLICATIONS



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters

FURNITURE



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



Courtesy of Michael Littlefield, ME

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Courtesy of Fu-Tung Cheng

FLOORING



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters

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FIREPLACES



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



Courtesy of Surface Works



Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



Courtesy of Fu-Tung Cheng

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Courtesy of Concrete Encounters



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RESOURCES:

<http://concreteencounters.blogspot.com/p/fireplaces.html> (Concrete Encounters)

www.barevines.com (Bare Vines Concrete Design)

www.concreteexchange.com